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Miss Estlin.





THE

ANTI-SLAVERY ADVOCATE

AND THE

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LONDON CONFERENCE.

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# THE ANTI-SLAVERY ADVOCATE

AND

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*To the Editor of THE ANTI-SLAVERY ADVOCATE.*

Dear Sir,—As one of the representatives of the North of England Anti-Slavery League, at the recent conference held at the London Tavern, under the auspices of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, as well as one of the delegates to that meeting appointed by the Manchester Conference, I feel it to be my duty to address you a reply to certain statements and insinuations (both editorial and otherwise) contained in the *Anti-Slavery Advocate* for this month, which seriously reflect upon the course pursued by Mr. Thompson at the meeting in question—a course which I, likewise, deemed it right to follow, and of the justice and policy of which I entertain the most profound conviction. Every one who took part in our councils will remember that in the repeated consultations that took place among many of the friends of the American Anti-Slavery Society, at the time of the holding of the Manchester Conference, it was deemed best not to waste our time and to exhaust our resources in a fruitless and an unnecessary crusade against the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society; but if it were required of us at all to enter the arena of controversy, to enter it as the stanch and uncompromising advocates of the Catholicity of the Anti-Slavery platform. I employ the

words "fruitless and unnecessary crusade," because, whatever may have been the policy of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in past times, it is admitted on all hands—not even excepting yourself, sir—that during the last two years, they have made considerable advances in the right direction; and it seems to me that it would be impolitic, as well as ungenerous, to stop them in that course by denouncing them now for former delinquencies, of which, I trust, they have repented; by refusing to give them credit for their nearer approach to our standard; or by casting suspicion upon their motives, and impugning their integrity.

Such then, in brief, were the views entertained by most, if not by all, of our "peculiar friends" who were present at the Manchester Conference;—views which required no diminution of our allegiance to the radical Anti-Slavery cause—no compromise of any kind; but which only required us to encourage the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in its improved action; to spur it on to increased faithfulness; and to co-operate with it as far as we consistently could. I may state, moreover, that at Manchester we decided that one of the best tests of the genuineness of the change in the policy of the Society, would be the terms of admission to its Conference. My gratification was great, when, on referring to the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* for September, I read the following announcement:—"Any person will be eligible as a member of the Conference, and entitled to take part in its proceedings, who subscribes to the fundamental principle, namely, that Slavery is a sin, and a crime against God, and, therefore, is not to be defended, or extenuated, but is to be uncompromisingly opposed, and its utter, and immediate extinction sought by the employment for that object of moral, and pacific means only."

This much of explanation is needed to show with what feelings we entered upon the performance of our duties as members of the late London Conferences.



The first statement made by *The Advocate* which requires notice is the following :—“ *The leading members of the New Broad-street Committee have declared in words, or substance, that no consideration could induce them to recognise the American Anti-Slavery Society, although they were willing to pass a general resolution of sympathy with the American Abolitionists. It was the opinion of Mr. George Thompson that this general resolution should be accepted.*”

I utterly deny that such a statement was made by “the leading members of the New Broad-street Committee,” or by any one of them, during the late Conference. The sole foundation for your charge was an observation made by Mr. Sturge to Mr. Thompson, in a *strictly private interview*, which took place between them. What Mr. Sturge said was this, “Nothing should induce him, *at that time*, to consent to the introduction in the Resolution of the name of any Society.” You, or your informants, in order, it may be, to demonstrate the unfaithfulness of Mr. Thompson, have magnified this remark into an utter, and everlasting repudiation of the American Anti-Slavery Society, not by Mr. Sturge merely, but by the leading members of the New Broad-street Committee !

After having accomplished this interesting work, you proceed to show that, as far as the Abolitionists of America were concerned, “the general resolution” was worthless ; and that “*it was not intended to include the American Anti-Slavery Society.*” So far is this from being correct, that Mr. Joseph Cooper (one of the most active and excellent members of the Committee), as well as Mr. Joseph Sturge, stated to Mr. Thompson that the resolution *was* intended to include the American Anti-Slavery Society. *This was again and again repeated.* And yet you tell your readers the very opposite : on what authority I know not. No doubt you believe implicitly what you state—but your information has been sadly defective.

A word or two now on the Rev. Francis Bishop's letter, in which our friend claims for himself, for Mr. James, and for Mr. Pillsbury, the exclusive advocacy of the claims of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The following is the most important part of his letter:—"In the course of the day we were shown a printed resolution on the subject of American slavery, intended to be proposed to-day. It was full and outspoken, and expressed sympathy with the American Anti-slavery Society, and with the American and Foreign Anti-slavery Society. We thought it on the whole unexceptionable; and to a most unexpected extent satisfactory to the friends of the American Anti-slavery Society. In the afternoon, however, we were informed that Mr. Chamerovzow had drawn up that resolution without the concurrence of his committee, some of whom objected to the American Anti-slavery Society being recognised. A meeting of the friends of the American Anti-slavery Society, after discussing this matter, ultimately separated, with a half-formed resolution to make a formal attempt in the meeting to get the American Anti-slavery Society distinctly and honourably recognised. We were, however, to think over the matter, and finally decide what course to take at half-past nine this morning (the Conference assembling at ten) at the London Tavern. After a private interview with Mr. Sturge, Mr. Thompson came to us in a waiting-room, and said there was an objection on the part of the committee to sanction the *American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* as well as the *American Anti-Slavery Society*; that they had determined to break off their connection with the former, and that we might get all we wanted, if we would now waive our wish to get the American Anti-Slavery Society formally recognized. *And he (Mr. Thompson) recommended us to agree to the wishes of the committee.* Mr. Sherman was all this time speaking on the American Resolution. I felt that we were in a great difficulty, and did not like to oppose Mr. Thompson's

“ judgment. But I could not feel satisfied in my own mind, after all that he said, that it was right to adopt his recommendation. We ought not, and *need not* have been in such a position as to have to come to a decision so hastily, and under such pressing circumstances. We went into the room in an undecided state.”

I perceive, in Mr. Bishop's letter, no less than in your editorial columns, a disinclination to do justice to Mr. Thompson. Every mention that is made of him is of a disparaging character; and, as I shall presently prove, the *suppressio veri* has been freely employed. Mr. Bishop does not describe the circumstances under which the names of the American, and American and Foreign, Anti-Slavery Societies, were introduced into the amended resolution which he saw; nor does he take the slightest notice of Mr. Thompson's exertions in connection with them. I will endeavour to supply the deficiency from my own recollection, as well as from the information communicated to me by Mr. Thompson in repeated conversations I have had with him on the subject. The day before the conference commenced its sittings, Mr. Thompson went down to the Anti-Slavery Office, at considerable inconvenience, expressly to ask permission to see the Resolution on American Slavery, but could not then see a copy, as it was not then prepared. On this occasion he had an interview with two leading members of the Committee, and with the utmost frankness expressed his opinion of the American Anti-Slavery Society; and, with great warmth and earnestness, rebuked the New Broad-street Committee for its past treatment of that society. On Tuesday evening, a copy of the Resolution was brought to the *Empire* office by Mr. Chamerovzow, he being on his way to his Committee's printer to get the Resolution printed, as there was not time to get it copied by hand. Mr. Chamerovzow's object in coming, was to confer with Mr. Thompson as to the course

which he, and his friends, intended to pursue, as there was a disposition on both sides, to avoid dissension. During this interview, in reply to a question from Mr. Thompson, Mr. Chamerovzow stated that the Resolution on American Slavery would be substantially the same as had been passed at the Manchester Conference. Mr. Thompson inquired if there was to be any special mention of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The answer was in the negative. Mr. Thompson then said, (and I quote his exact words), "But for past differences between the American Anti-Slavery Society, and your body, the Resolution would be unexceptionable; but considering those differences, and your avowed desire that they should cease, it is my opinion that there should be a distinct recognition of the American Anti-Slavery Society." He was told that "the Committee had embraced that Society in their Resolution from its commencement; but for special reasons, *not unfriendly to that Society*, it had been thought advisable to speak in general terms." But Mr. Thompson, in discharge of his duty to the American Society, and with a view to avoid controversy, pressed for the insertion of the name of that society. His suggestion was inserted in the margin, and the resolution was carried away. On the following day Mr. Thompson, during the interval between the two sessions of the Conference, read a printed resolution embodying his suggestion (but containing the addition of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society) to a meeting of the friends of the American Society, by whom it was approved, as is stated by Mr. Bishop. On his return, Mr. Thompson was informed that the Committee could not adopt the resolution in that form. The amendment had been made without their authority; and it was by mere accident that a copy of it had passed out of the hands of some member of the Committee. He was invited to meet Mr. Joseph Sturge and Mr. R. Foster, to deliberate upon the difficulty.

At the interview, Mr. Thompson again strongly urged the mention in the Resolution of the American Society. On the following morning, according to an appointment made through me, Mr. Thompson again saw Mr. Sturge, together with Mr. Cooper. Their opinion as to the advisability of the adoption of their own Resolution remained unchanged; but Mr. Thompson received from them the most emphatic assurances that they were anxious past differences should be obliterated; and that he and his friends were at perfect liberty to say what they pleased in justification of the American Society in the Conference. [“Not only will no exception be taken to what you say,” said Mr. Joseph Sturge, “*but we shall be most happy to hear justice done to that Society.*”]

I ask, therefore, after these concessions had been made; after the Conference had maintained the unfettered catholicity of the Anti-slavery platform by the admission of ladies, no less than by the overthrow of the barriers of sect; after the widest latitude of speech had been allowed to all parties; and after Mr. Parker Pillsbury himself had been requested to second the American Resolution proposed by Mr. Sherman;—I ask whether in the face of this spirit of conciliation, and of justice, Mr. Thompson’s duty to the Anti-slavery cause required him to cast the apple of discord into the Conference; and to brand with burning invectives the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society?

There is but one other point in Mr. Bishop’s letter to which I need allude. He states that Mr. Thompson advised the “Garrisonians” to agree to the Committee’s Resolutions. This he did not do. He sought to influence the judgement of no one, and contented himself with expressing his own individual opinion.

At the bottom of one of the columns containing the Report of the Conference, you have placed the following footnote, which refers to Mr. Thompson’s speech on Mr. Bishop’s

amendment :—“ *No other report of Conference amongst many which have reached us makes any mention of the speech of Mr. Thompson thus succinctly reported ; nor of any other allusion by him to the American Anti-Slavery Society.*” I think I do not commit an error when I say that the impression which the perusal of this foot-note is calculated to produce on the mind of the reader is, that Mr. Thompson did not make a speech in which (to quote the report of the *Empire*, copied by the *Advocate*,) “ he paid a glowing tribute of respect to the American Anti-Slavery Society.” Your insinuation is totally without foundation, and is as ungenerous as it is untrue. Will you produce a witness who will dare to deny my statement? If so, I will produce fifty to testify to the truthfulness of the *Empire’s* report, which was prepared by myself, and which was not seen by Mr. Thompson until after its publication. Happily my friend, Mr. Farmer, took a *verbatim* report of Mr. Thompson’s speech, which shows that while it may suit the correspondents of the *Advocate* to be silent as to what he said, he nevertheless did ample justice to the merits of the brave band of Transatlantic Abolitionists, with whom he has been associated for nearly a quarter of a century. This theme formed the burden of his speech, although “ A Delegate,” who, I am sorry to see, dates from Manchester, could find in it nothing to write about, but that it “ ended in recommending peace.” This reference to it, however, meagre and unfriendly as it is, seems to disprove the statements of the Editor, that “ no other report” but that in the *Empire* makes mention of Mr. Thompson’s speech, and I am quite at a loss to account for this insidious insinuation.

Mr. Bishop made the withdrawal of his amendment depend upon the denial, by the New Broad-street Committee, of the existence, in their minute-book, of any resolution repudiating the American Anti-Slavery Society—a charge which I never heard preferred against them. Mr. Thompson, how-

ever, demanded and obtained guarantees for the future. He said, "with the understanding that the American Anti-Slavery Society will henceforth receive, at the hands of the British and Foreign Society, the same meed of approbation which the slave it is labouring to redeem would bestow upon it; and will be judged, not according to the views, when off the Anti-Slavery platform, of some of its members, but according to its principles and conduct as an Anti-Slavery body, I shall consent to the withdrawal of the amendment." I do not wish to draw a comparison between Mr. Thompson and Mr. Bishop prejudicial to the latter: I am only desirous that you should see how unjust you and your correspondents have been to Mr. Thompson.

I regret the necessity which has been imposed upon me of writing you so long a letter to correct the mistakes into which the *Anti-Slavery Advocate* has fallen—mistakes which, as you will perceive, are calculated to damage Mr. Thompson, and myself) who acted with him, in the estimation of those friends of the slave both in this country, and in the United States of America, with whom we have hitherto co-operated, and whose friendship and confidence we hope ever to retain.

Yours truly,

F. W. CHESSON.

*Fleet-street, London,*  
*12th January, 1855.*

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